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Committee of Experts on Public Administration

Report on the second session (7-11 April 2003)

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Note

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Summary

The present report contains the main findings and recommendations of the second session of the Committee of Experts on Public Administration, held at United Nations Headquarters from 7 to 11 April 2003. The Committee, which was established by the Economic and Social Council in its resolution 2001/45, consists of 24 experts appointed in their personal capacity for a four-year period. In accordance with Council decision 2003/207, the Committee discussed: (a) enhancing the capacity of public administration to implement the United Nations Millennium Declaration; (b) basic data on the public sector; and (c) United Nations activities on public administration.

Based on the discussion of the above-mentioned topics, the Committee concluded that the need to revitalize and revalidate public administration to enable the State to perform its changing role so as to better serve citizens is an overarching priority for all countries. It pointed out that, indeed, one of the most critical issues emerging from each of the major international conferences and summits on topics of global concern had been the central role of governance systems and institutions in promoting economic and social development; increasing the access of services to the vast majority of the poor; enforcing human rights legislation; enhancing the participation of women in the development process; and protecting the quality of the environment. Given the importance of efficient public administration systems for the attainment of social development goals, it also recommended that the Economic and Social Council establish linkages between the work of the Commission for Social Development and the remit and work of the Committee.

Moreover, and in light of the above, the Committee recommended that the Economic and Social Council bring the issue of governance and public administration to the forefront of the development agenda and suggested that the Council might wish to devote its next high-level segment to this topic. It further recommended that public administration issues become an integral part of the process of follow-up to conferences, and suggested that the Committee itself could serve as a valuable source of advice to the intergovernmental machinery in that respect.

As mandated, the Committee reviewed, commented and made recommendations on the United Nations Programme in Public Administration and Finance. In particular, the Committee recommended that the Secretariat continue to provide, upon request of Member States, technical advisory support in the areas of enhancing the quality of personnel in the public sector; reinforcing governance and public administration systems and institutions; and fostering transparency and accountability, as well as reconstructing public administration in post-conflict countries and in situations of decentralized governance. It also recommended that the Secretariat undertake additional work to further analyse and delineate the role of the State as enabler and user of knowledge and technology in order to support and encourage innovation throughout public administration and society as a whole. Furthermore, it recommended that the Secretariat continue its work in the field of basic data on the public sector and progressively expand the number of indicators, focusing in particular on government efficiency, transparency and participation. It

suggested that this exercise be carried out in partnership with agencies and institutes currently working on this topic.

The Committee commended the *World Public Sector Report* as being an extremely valuable tool for policy makers and practitioners in Member States; recommended that the Secretariat should focus, in its next issue, on human resources development; and advised the Secretariat of the usefulness of having the publication translated into other languages. Finally, the Committee stressed the importance of capitalizing on the successes of the United Nations Online Network in Public Administration and Finance (UNPAN) by expanding its reach to the subregional level in order to strengthen the capacity of subregional institutions on public administration.

Contents

Chapter		*Page*
I.	Organization of the session	1
	A. Duration of the session	1
	B. Attendance	1
	C. Agenda	2
	D. Election of officers	2
II.	Main findings and recommendations	3
	A. Introduction	3
	B. Recommendations requiring action by the Economic and Social Council	6
	C. Recommendations brought to the attention of the Economic and Social Council	6
	1. Recommendations addressed to Governments	6
	2. Recommendations addressed to the United Nations system	9
III.	Work of the Committee of Experts at its second session	12
	A. Strategies for high-quality staffing in the public sector	12
	B. Status of and trends in e-government development	14
	C. Mainstreaming poverty reduction strategies within the Millennium Development Goals: the role of public administration	15
	D. Basic data on the public sector	16
	E. Review of the United Nations Programme in Public Administration and Finance	17
IV.	Future work of the Committee of Experts	19
Annex		
	List of documents	20

Chapter I
Organization of the session

A. Duration of the session

1. The Committee of Experts on Public Administration, which was established by the Economic and Social Council in its resolution 2001/45 and consists of 24 experts appointed in their personal capacity by the Council upon the nomination of the Secretary-General, held its second session at United Nations Headquarters from 7 to 11 April 2003.

B. Attendance

2. The session was attended by the following members: Jean-Marie Atangana Mebara (Cameroon), Minister of State, Secretary-General, Presidency of the Republic; Marie-Françoise Bechtel (France), Conseiller d'État, Conseil d'État; Jocelyne Bourgon (Canada), President, Canadian Centre for Management Development; Luiz Carlos Bresser-Pereira (Brazil), Getúlio Vargas Foundation; Geraldine J. Fraser-Moleketi (South Africa), Minister for Public Service and Administration; Werner Jann (Germany), Chair for Political Science, Administration and Organization, Potsdam University; Jin Liqun (China), Vice-Minister of Finance; Gonzalo D. Martner Fanta (Chile), Deputy Secretary, Ministerio Secretaría General de la Presidencia; Kuldeep Mathur (India), Academic Director, Centre for the Study of Law and Governance, Jawaharlal Nehru University; José Oscar Monteiro (Mozambique), Coordinator of Project ISAP — Instituto Superior da Administração Pública, Mozambique, Visiting Professor, University of the Witwatersrand (South Africa); Akira Nakamura (Japan), Dean of the Graduate School, Department of Political Science, Meiji University; Jaime Rodriguez-Arana Munoz (Spain), Director, Instituto Nacional de Administración Pública; Dennis A. Rondinelli (United States of America), Glaxo Distinguished International Professor of Management, Kenan-Flagler Business School, University of North Carolina; Otton Solis-Fallas (Costa Rica), Member of the Board of the Open University of Costa Rica; Patricia A. Santo Tomas (Philippines), Minister of Labour and Employment; and Volodymyr G. Yatsuba (Ukraine), State Secretary, Cabinet of Ministers. The following members could not attend: Rachid Benmokhtar Benabdellah (Morocco), President, Al Akhawayn University; Petrus Compton (Saint Lucia), Attorney-General and Minister for Justice; Giuseppe Franco Ferrari (Italy), Chair for Public Comparative Law, L. Bocconi University of Milan; Barbara Kudrycka (Poland), Rector, Bialystok School of Public Administration; Beshara Merhej (Lebanon), Member of Parliament and Minister of State; Apolo Nsibambi (Uganda), Prime Minister; Sakhir Thiam (Senegal), President, University of Dakar-Bourguiba; and Borwornsak Uwanno (Thailand), Secretary-General, King Prajadhipok Institute.

C. Agenda

3. In accordance with Economic and Social Council decision 2003/207, the agenda of the Committee for its second session was as follows:

1. Election of officers.
2. Adoption of the agenda and other organizational matters.
3. Enhancing the capacity of public administration to implement the United Nations Millennium Declaration.
4. Basic data on the public sector.
5. Review of United Nations activities on public administration.
6. Proposed programme of work and agenda for the next session of the Committee of Experts.

D. Election of officers

4. In view of the absence of the Chairperson, Prime Minister Apolo Nsibambi (Uganda), the Committee agreed to elect an additional Vice-Chairperson, Ms. Jocelyne Bourgon (Canada), and to elect Mr. José Oscar Monteiro (Mozambique) as Rapporteur. Thus, the Bureau of the Committee was modified as follows:

Chairperson:
Prime Minister Apolo Nsibambi (Uganda)*

Vice-Chairpersons:
Marie-Françoise Bechtel (France)
Luiz Carlos Bresser-Pereira (Brazil)
Jin Liqun (China)
Jocelyne Bourgon (Canada)

Rapporteur:
José Oscar Monteiro (Mozambique)

* Unable to attend.

Chapter II
Main findings and recommendations

A. Introduction

1. The Committee noted with satisfaction the emphasis placed by the Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs, Mr. Nitin Desai, in his introductory statement, on the importance of building national capacity, as well as national appropriation and ownership in the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals.

2. In view of the challenge of achieving the Millennium Development Goals and the role of different institutions in that endeavour, the Committee pointed out that there was a growing need to reassert the importance of the State and public organizations as instruments to achieve public goals and secure the public interest — understood as fulfilment of the needs of citizens and communities, as well as the protection of individual rights, as befitted a democratic system and State.

3. Issues relating to the role of the State were brought to the fore around 15 years ago and different alternatives suggested and experimented with. Many of these have resulted in a better delimitation of the public sphere and, shedding away burdensome and unnecessary activities, have helped to refocus public concerns on essential areas. Alternative mechanisms, including partnerships, have shown that they can play an important role, but the State and public institutions are pivotal actors since they are ultimately responsible for the satisfaction of citizens' basic needs.

4. A good, efficient and accountable public administration — within an effective democratic system — is in fact essential to meeting the Millennium Development Goals, including the reduction of poverty, as well as the improvement in access to and quality of basic social services. Efficient public policies make the State and public administration more capable of developing an enabling environment for a stronger market and a better society.

5. If we are to achieve the Millennium Development Goals — which incorporate minimum living standards defined at national, regional and global levels — it is necessary to better define the requirements for good performance of public institutions. For example, in most countries, State expenditure accounts for a substantial percentage of gross domestic product (GDP). Yet, the level and attention paid to the management of such a large body of resources are not commensurate with its potentialities in improving delivery of public goods.

6. Furthermore, the Committee pointed out that the challenges in implementing the Millennium Development Goals would be in jeopardy if all actors involved were not brought on board as promoters, regulators and participants. This underscores a larger role for participation, namely through decentralization, social responsibility of all societal actors, more information and informed decisions at citizen-community levels. This applies also to the private sector, whose social responsibilities have increased. In light of the above, the Committee emphasized that good governance was also about effective collaboration between the public and the private sectors and civil society, and that each domain required its fair share of the best talent.

7. Partnerships between the State, the private sector and civil society were in fact highlighted by the Committee as crucial elements for a sound public administration.

In view of the changes brought about by globalization and of the limited resources within which States operated, the Committee proposed to examine what policies Governments needed to develop in order to deal more effectively with the private sector and civil society in the achievement of development goals. It was recognized that all actors had a key role to play in social and economic progress and that Governments needed to enhance their understanding of how to create synergies and bring about greater coordination among the undertakings of the public sector, the private sector and civil society.

8. In fact, according to the Committee, one of the most critical issues emerging from each of the major international conferences and summits on key issues of global concern — including the environment, human rights, human settlements, social development, the status of women, children and financing for development — has been the central role of governance systems and institutions in promoting economic development, increasing the access to services of the vast majority of the poor, enforcing human rights legislation, enhancing the participation of women in the development process, and protecting the quality of the environment.

9. Furthermore, the Committee underscored that States Members of the United Nations, bilateral and multilateral agencies and civil society organizations, were increasingly focusing on the need to improve the quality and effectiveness of governance and public administration. They also recognize that governance and public administration play a vital role in an integrated follow-up strategy to United Nations conferences and summits that share similar concerns, such as providing economic opportunities to the poor and improving their access to basic services, including education, health, water and sanitation. These concerns were clearly highlighted at the Millennium Summit, a landmark event leading to the adoption by the General Assembly of the United Nations Millennium Declaration (see General Assembly resolution 55/2) and the report of the Secretary-General on a road map towards the implementation of the United Nations Millennium Declaration (A/56/326), the annex to which set out the Millennium Development Goals.

10. In discussing the challenges that Member States faced at this current juncture, the Committee concluded that revitalizing and revalidating public administration to enable the State to perform its changing role and to better serve citizens was an overarching priority for all countries. In fact, the Committee noted that weak governance was not only a problem of developing countries, but a major challenge facing developed nations as well.

11. In its discussion about what it means to revitalize public administration and strengthen institutions, the Committee agreed that it was very important not to lose sight of the instrumentality of the State. In other words, the concept of strengthening institutions has to be linked to the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals.

12. The above consideration leads to two important challenges. First, a higher degree of commitment at the national and local levels is necessary for the successful implementation of the Millennium Development Goals. Second, the public sphere needs to develop the capacity to protect citizens against social risks and generate policies aimed at ensuring equal opportunities for citizens, particularly the more vulnerable, including children and the elderly. The Committee pointed out that, although social organizations had a role to play in providing decentralized services in areas involving basic rights, the State had the fundamental role in respect of

funding either partially or in full these activities. Enhancing the role of the State also requires increased government savings, which allow public investment and sustainable growth.

13. The Committee suggested that, in order to take into account national peculiarities in the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals, actions should be undertaken at the regional level, using, whenever possible, existing regional organizations. The Committee therefore urged United Nations institutions to engage in a dialogue with different countries to promote the Millennium Development Goals as part of a national governance effort towards a strong State with a culture of learning.

14. Moreover, the Committee stressed that human resources capacity was critical to the quality of public administration. Indeed, the increasing complexity of both policy-making and administrative processes, as well as the erosion of human resources capacity to carry out those core functions, is making it difficult for many Member States to implement the goals of reducing poverty and promoting sustainable human development, as emphasized in the Millennium Development Goals.

15. In this respect, the Committee highlighted two issues of main concern. One is the definition of a senior civil service cadre, competent and accountable, which should be partially renewed periodically on a merit basis. The other is the need to invest in leadership and management development, as well as staff training.

16. Furthermore, according to the Committee, countries should play a greater role in identifying their specific needs. In particular, the leadership development programme in Africa should be extensively discussed among role players. To this effect, the meeting of African Ministers of Public Administration to be held in May 2003 in Cape Town could be a good occasion to hold such a type of consultations and finalize the training programme and its modalities.

17. The Committee resolved that, besides achieving sound wage systems, inculcating a sense of pride in the public service should be one of the main endeavours of international organizations. It felt that, given its moral authority in promoting the common good, it behoved the United Nations to articulate and herald the reinvigoration and revalidation of the role of the State. Therefore, the Committee recommended that United Nations Public Service Day celebrations should become an outstanding event in order to inspire public servants and increase citizens' awareness of the important role that public servants play, at all levels of government, in achieving public goals. This event, as well as the awards for best public service, should be given more exposure and form part of a broader action at international, regional and national levels so as to have a greater impact on society and new generations. The Committee recognized that the Secretariat had started addressing this issue and encouraged its efforts.

18. The Committee expressed its concern about the need to establish bridges between generations in the public service in order to ensure the continuity of values that enhanced cohesion within societies, such as solidarity and securing equal rights.

19. The Committee pointed out that politicians and senior civil servants needed a clear understanding of their respective roles in national governance, particularly as the nature of this interface could greatly influence the degree of professionalism in the public service. Likewise, the Committee stressed that there was a set of guiding

Recommendation 4

32. **The Committee believes that Governments should create a learning organization culture in the public service and tap talent from underrepresented groups.**

Recommendation 5

33. **The Committee recommends that government leaders take up the challenge of ensuring that the powers of e-government are used to deliver more rapid and improved public services, to enhance transparency and to enable people to increase their say in policy-making decisions, so as to foster greater participation and accelerated development. It also recommends that Governments pay particular attention to ensuring privacy rights and legal protection when establishing e-government systems.**

2. Recommendations addressed to the United Nations system

Recommendation 1

34. **The Committee recommends that, given the high-quality work being undertaken by the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the Secretariat in the field of public administration and governance, the Secretariat more widely disseminate among Member States and the general public information on the activities related to the United Nations Programme in Public Administration and Finance. In this respect, it suggests that the Secretariat prepare press releases to distribute to professional categories. Moreover, the Committee recommends that the Secretariat make use of the network utilized for the United Nations Public Service Awards to reach most sectors of society and reiterates that a statement by the Secretary-General on the occasion of United Nations Public Service Day would greatly enhance the perceived image of the public sector.**

Recommendation 2

35. **The Committee took note of the important reorganization within the Secretariat that further integrated normative and analytical work with technical assistance. It recommends that this synergy between normative work and technical assistance work carried out by the Secretariat be maintained and further enhanced.**

Recommendation 3

36. **The Committee considers the *World Public Sector Report* an extremely valuable tool for policy makers and practitioners in Member States and requests the Secretariat to continue its publication on emerging topics highlighted by the Committee. It also advises the Secretariat on the need to make the document available in more languages.**

Recommendation 4

37. **The Committee recommends that the Secretariat undertake policy analysis and research in developing human capacity in the public sector of developing countries and present the findings in the upcoming *World Public Sector Report*.**

Recommendation 5

38. **The Committee stressed the importance of capitalizing on the successes of the United Nations Online Network in Public Administration and Finance (UNPAN) by expanding its reach to the subregional level in order to strengthen the capacity of subregional institutions in public administration.**

Recommendation 6

39. **The Committee recommends that the Secretariat develop and share tools and guidelines for enhancing human resources planning and management capacities in developing countries (including regional public service charters and manuals on codes of conduct).**

Recommendation 7

40. **The Committee recommends that the Secretariat organize forums (meetings, seminars, workshops) at regional levels (Africa, the Arab world, Latin America, Asia and the Pacific, Central and Eastern Europe) and in small island States, especially for developing countries, to further explore how to strengthen the human resources capacity in the public sector and develop appropriate solutions.**

Recommendation 8

41. **The Committee recommends that the Secretariat continue to provide, upon request of Member States, technical advisory support in the areas of enhancing the quality of personnel in the public sector; reinforcing governance and public administration systems and institutions; and fostering transparency and accountability, as well as reconstructing public administration in post-conflict countries and situations of decentralized governance.**

Recommendation 9

42. **The Committee recommends that the Secretariat intensify leadership development activities, with a particular focus on Africa and developing countries in general, and emphasize capacity-building support to and partnerships with regional and national institutions to provide the necessary training.**

Recommendation 10

43. **The Committee recommends that the Secretariat undertake additional work to further analyse and delineate the role of the State as enabler and user of knowledge and technology in order to support and encourage innovation throughout public administration and society as a whole.**

Recommendation 11

44. **The Committee recommends that the Secretariat focus its future work in the area of e-government on how to fund e-government and how Governments can secure appropriate financing mechanisms towards the building of learning infrastructures.**

Recommendation 12

45. **The Committee recommends that the Secretariat focus on the impact of e-government on poverty reduction, and continue publishing the global e-government survey on an annual basis, while paying special attention to the use of e-government for deepening participation. Appropriate tools for benchmarking the use of e-government should also be developed over time and become part of the methodology applied by the survey.**

Recommendation 13

46. **The Committee recommends that the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the Secretariat, through its networks and advisory services, provide technical cooperation assistance for mainstreaming the Millennium Development Goals in the national policy space; provide upstream policy advice to facilitate and enhance the concept of "engaged governance"; and help introduce new tools, techniques and practices in the pursuance of the Millennium Development Goals.**

Recommendation 14

47. **The Committee recommends that the Secretariat, and in particular the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the Secretariat, take all necessary steps, through studies, research and advisory services, to ensure that regional efforts in support of the Millennium Development Goals are understood and facilitated.**

Recommendation 15

48. **The Committee urges the Secretariat, together with national and regional organizations, to undertake a systematic assessment of institutional capacity requirements in sub-Saharan Africa, and produce a compendium and a compilation of experiences and good practices in public administration. The latter should be undertaken also with reference to other regions of the world.**

Recommendation 16

49. **The Committee recommends that the Secretariat take all necessary steps to ensure that the Working Group on Basic Data on the Public Sector, which was set up at the Committee's present session, is established as a permanent group with the objective of guiding the Secretariat in its work on selecting a specific set of indicators on the public sector.**

Recommendation 17

50. **The Committee recommends that the Secretariat embark on a step-by-step approach of researching among the various indicators that can be used to characterize the public sector, and which may be available from other organizations, bearing in mind the following three aspects of evaluating the public sector: efficiency, transparency and participation. This exercise should be carried out in partnership with agencies and institutes currently working on this topic.**

Chapter III
Work of the Committee of Experts at its second session

A. Strategies for high-quality staffing in the public sector

1. The discussion was based on a report of the Secretariat on strategies for high-quality staffing in the public sector (E/C.16/2003/4), which emphasized that high-quality staffing in the public sector is critical to the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals and other intergovernmental commitments, including the Plan of Implementation of the World Summit on Sustainable Development (Johannesburg Plan of Implementation).[1]

2. The paper also highlighted two contradictory developments that characterize public sector management in many countries: the increasing complexity of both policy-making and administrative processes, on the one hand, and the erosion of human resources capacity to carry out those core functions, on the other.

3. At its first session, held in July 2002, the Committee of Experts on Public Administration had identified six key areas for national capacity-building. Foremost among these challenges was the need for the public sector to develop a strategy to recruit and retain its fair share of the best talent.[2] The erosion in human resources capacity in the public sector in its various manifestations has been brought about by a confluence of factors, including the declining image of the public sector, the persistence of clientelistic practices, and the related decline of governing institutions in stagnating countries. The need for national policy makers to critically examine the root causes of human capital erosion in the public sector and to develop long-term strategies to reverse this trend was therefore stressed.

4. Four core competencies essential for reinforcing the public sector were identified: committed and principled leadership; informed policy analysis; professional and accountable management; and accessible and responsive service delivery. It was noted, however, that these core competencies can be built up only within a sound institutional framework and an environment of good governance. In fact, in trying to single out some of the key factors affecting the ability of the public sector to recruit and retain its share of the best talent, the Committee emphasized the critical role played by an effective institutional framework. Administrative reforms require the adoption of comprehensive strategies that involve investments in capacity-building of legal and institutional frameworks simultaneously, in terms of both systems and human capital. It was further pointed out that institutional development is not likely to take place without such comprehensive strategies.

5. High-quality staffing in the public sector therefore requires the adoption of a holistic approach and long-term human development strategies that yield varying options, based on the specific needs of particular Member States. The options can be based on a "career system", a "job system" or — as is often the case — a hybrid. Nevertheless, some important elements that States need to consider in strengthening

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[1] *Report of the World Summit on Sustainable Development, Johannesburg, South Africa, 26 August-4 September 2002* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.03.II.A.1 and Corr.1), chap. I, resolution 2, annex.

[2] See *Official Records of the Economic and Social Council, 2002, Supplement No. 24* (E/2002/84), paras. 15 and 16.

human capital in the public sector include: establishing human resources planning management systems and units; professionalizing the public service, including human resources management; enhancing the social value of service to the public; creating a learning culture in public institutions; and utilizing the best talent from underrepresented groups. A deliberate and sustained strategy to develop strong cadres of human resources management professionals in the public sector, including effective information management, should also be pursued.

6. Another major challenge facing many countries is to build up or restore a sense of pride in public sector employment. An efficient public sector is key to economic and social development. Economic theories emphasize the crucial role that the public sector plays in the provision of public goods, as well as in dealing with externalities.

7. Those countries that value the public sector generally find it much easier to recruit and retain competent staff, and to inculcate a sense of pride in the public service. Strict adherence to competitive and merit-based recruitment systems is the best means to raise performance standards and to recruit and retain a fair share of the best talent in the public sector. It was also noted that monetary rewards play an important role in the recruitment and retention of high-calibre staff. In addition, human resources managers should adopt recruitment strategies already applied effectively in selected fields of the public service. Induction training should invariably be an important part of the recruitment process.

8. Given the rapidly changing environment in which the public sector operates, the Committee pointed out that strengthening leadership capacity should be at the centre of development efforts, and strong collaboration and partnerships should be established to support developing countries in strengthening their leadership capacity in the public sector. The centrality of the quality of leadership in the public sector as a key element for the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals was further emphasized by Mr. Allan Rosenbaum, President of the International Association of Schools and Institutes of Administration (IASIA), in a presentation made to the Committee on "Improving the quality of leadership in the public sector: new needs, new approaches and new strategies". In this regard, he mentioned the ongoing initiative sponsored by the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the Secretariat and the International Association of Schools and Institutes of Administration and its programme for leadership development.

9. In line with the above, the Committee recommended that the new leadership training programme of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs focus on capacity development both of leaders and of strategic decision makers in the public service. The Committee suggested that the programme should be designed to strengthen the role of public servants in protecting the public interest defined in consultation with citizens; in promoting a culture of openness, ethics and appropriate behaviour; in fostering dialogue in society; and in enhancing strategic management capacities.

10. The Committee also suggested that the programme train participants to better understand the interlinkages between different subsystems of the public administration system involved in realizing policy objectives, such as the Millennium Development Goals, as well as wider administrative reform processes. Training can also play a key role in organizational transformation. While political leaders could help frame the capacity-building requirements of public

administrators, training of senior officials and other strategic decision makers should be mainly undertaken by regional management development organizations.

B. Status of and trends in e-government development

11. The discussion was based on the report of the Secretariat on the status of and trends in the development of e-government (E/C.16/2003/2). The report suggested that Governments should carefully examine and seriously consider the potential benefits as well as the drawbacks of introducing e-government applications in their operations.

12. The Committee pointed out that Governments play a dual role as enablers and users of information and communication technologies (ICT) in public administration. Governments can use ICT to reorganize the way in which they operate in order to develop citizenry and educate the public about the complex issues of the State. They can also use e-governance to improve accountability at all levels through transparency. Ultimately, where and how to use ICT in government operations are a matter of political decision.

13. Mr. Fernando Moreno Peña, Governor of the State of Colima, Mexico, who made a presentation to the Committee on an e-information system for public service delivery, illustrated the potential benefits of e-government in providing greater access to public services through a concrete case. The system relies on a single key (code) for the population registry, which allows citizens to access all kinds of information through a service kiosk made available to individuals without the need for additional personnel. The system has also increased transparency in government operations and has lowered corruption. In addition, the system allows for risk management in the case of earthquakes in that State by offering support to people whose houses have been damaged.

14. In essence, the Committee agreed that the value of ICT in enhancing the capacity of government cannot be disputed. E-government has various roles, namely: (a) to inform citizens; (b) to get work done more effectively and efficiently, thereby reducing administrative costs; and (c) to enhance participation. At the same time, however, the introduction of e-government has its own set of problems, involving, inter alia, costs and infrastructure, as well as privacy and confidentiality. The Committee pointed out that weak institutions and limited skills are among the most serious factors in hampering e-government development, followed by weak technological infrastructure and low funding capacity.

15. Although the Committee concurred on the particular benefits of e-government, it stressed that the issue of costs versus benefits should be carefully considered, particularly by developing countries. The question is whether it is reasonable, especially in low-income countries, to invest a large amount of resources in systems that people use sparingly.

16. The Committee also questioned the impact of e-government on poverty reduction and economic development, and considered the issue of security, including identity theft. Moreover, it pointed out that experience in certain countries showed that government was good at communicating with citizens, but bad at communicating with other government agencies.

17. A major challenge for government leaders is to ensure both that the powers of e-government allow people to develop themselves more freely in society and that ICT can be harnessed to enhance accountability. The digital divide is a strong concern for many policy makers since developing programmes in e-government is a costly process and requires adequate expertise. The role of international organizations, according to the Committee, should be one of supporting this process.

C. Mainstreaming poverty reduction strategies within the Millennium Development Goals: the role of public administration

18. The discussion was based on the report of the Secretariat on mainstreaming poverty reduction strategies within the Millennium Development Goals: the role of public administration (E/C.16/2003/5). The report argued that one of the main challenges outlined in the Millennium Development Goals was the reduction of abject and dehumanizing poverty to which condition more than 1 billion people are currently consigned.

19. The Secretariat summarized the main requirements and concerns regarding socio-economic governance, and pointed out that strengthening the capacity of socio-economic institutions is key to the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals, and to the active pursuit of engaged governance, which links public administration and processes to social capital. In fact, the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals, particularly poverty reduction, depends crucially on the effectiveness and efficiency of institutions, especially at the national level.

20. Five central considerations related to the Millennium Development Goals were highlighted. First, it was noted that the Millennium Development Goals have universal legitimacy since they have been accepted by government leaders worldwide and are the culmination of a series of international initiatives and conferences, which, since the 1970s, have paid increasing attention to social objectives. Second, it was pointed out that the Millennium Development Goals are unique since they encompass clear human development objectives and targets that are attainable. Third, the targets, issues and imperatives related to the Millennium Development Goals were examined and discussed. Fourth, the imperatives and implications of the Millennium Development Goals were analysed. Finally, the internal realignment of institutions for better connectivity, the shift from sector-oriented planning to socially oriented goal-based planning, and a more engaging governance for fuller participation in policy processes were highlighted.

21. The Committee pointed out that one of the main challenges that many countries face is how to promote a government and civil society compact so as to achieve the Millennium Development Goals, and how to enable their government to enhance the mobilization of resources from civil society.

22. The Committee recognized that at present there is a gap between goals, which are usually set internationally, and processes for their implementation, which are nationally driven. It therefore recommended that the United Nations system support national Governments in bridging the gap between the goals set at the international level and the nationally led processes to meet these goals.

23. The Committee argued that, through South-South and North-South cooperation, the United Nations system can help empower national Governments to

upgrade their public administration capacities for the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals, namely, in the fields of policy-making, monitoring and direct service delivery, where required.

24. The Committee strongly emphasized the key role that regional institutions, and decentralization, play in the promotion of the Millennium Development Goals. It noted that decentralization promotes not only democratic principles at the subnational level, but also poverty eradication — a key objective of the Millennium Development Goals. The Committee further urged that all necessary steps be taken, including studies, research and support, to ensure that regional initiatives in support of the Millennium Development Goals are adequately implemented. In this regard, Mr. Bernardo Kliksberg, special adviser, made a presentation to the Committee on "The Millennium Development Goals: the role of public administration in Latin America".

25. Moreover, many of the concepts discussed and points raised by the Secretariat were further elaborated and supported by Mr. Sam Rahubadda (Government of Sri Lanka), who made a presentation to the Committee on "National development policy frameworks and the Millennium Goals in the context of Sri Lanka". Challenges in technical assistance activities in the field of socio-economic governance were highlighted by Ms. Mary Hilderbrand, Harvard University, who made a presentation to the Committee on "Capacity assessment in developing countries: lessons of experience".

D. Basic data on the public sector

26. The discussion was based on the report of the Secretariat on basic data on the public sector (E/C.16/2003/3), which proposed expanding the original list of five input indicators on the size and functions of the public sector in the world to include an output indicator of overall efficiency and accountability of public sector financial management. The Committee was invited to select additional indicators from three categories outlined in that report. The Secretariat suggested adopting such an expanded set of indicators as a basis for the evolution of current basic data on the public sector into the global public sector monitor.

27. The Committee concurred that the present high demand for indicators by international policy makers posed two types of challenge. The first challenge is to focus on a short list of indicators that may be widely used by the political bodies of the United Nations and the media. The specificity of public sector performance indicators remains important for detailed performance monitoring in various policy areas. The second challenge is to build the capacity for estimating those indicators at a satisfactory level of quality.

28. There was wide recognition that the process of evaluating the public sector is a complex exercise, given that the public sector is no longer homogeneous. It is also difficult to draw conclusions from input data with respect to output, and then with respect to outcome. For example, crime depends on many social factors. Therefore, the Secretariat suggested that it might not be wise to focus on outcome indicators. The task of comparative performance is fraught with difficulties. As an example, one country (Japan) had tried to study the size of government and came up with a statistic that showed it had the smallest ratio of public employees to population among the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD)

countries. On closer examination, however, the statistic turned out to be misleading since it did not include part-timers or take into account solutions adopted by civil society that offered a substitute for a portion of the services traditionally provided by the State.

29. It was also felt that the creation by the government of an enabling environment conducive to economic activity and social development was an important element in the evaluation exercise. The Committee underscored that, in order to determine public sector efficiency, it was important to have data on the unitary costs of various services provided by public administrations, for example, electricity, education of first-grade students and supplying water to a family. In addition, it recommended that data on the participation of society in deliberative structures should be more carefully examined.

30. Furthermore, the Committee suggested that the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the Secretariat analyse data concerning resources allocated at the regional and local levels. Evaluating the public sector is a very difficult task because it is not easy to assess effects when there are long lags between input and output. There are nevertheless useful indicators that can be extracted from the databases of other organizations, which may then be organized and interpreted in a meaningful manner.

E. Review of the United Nations Programme in Public Administration and Finance

31. The Secretariat made a presentation on the United Nations Programme in Public Administration and Finance, which touched upon developments since the last session of the Committee of Experts. It summarized the work of the Secretariat in the area of public administration and governance, and highlighted proposed new activities. It also drew attention to the recent reforms of the Secretary-General, which had further enhanced the capacity of the Secretariat to support policy deliberations in the area of public administration, particularly with respect to the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals.

32. The Committee strongly commended the presentation made by the Secretariat for providing a very clear and comprehensive framework for the United Nations Programme in Public Administration and Finance, and expressed its deep appreciation for the work and progress that had been achieved in the past year and for the coherence of the proposed future activities. It also commended the Secretariat for its high-quality work in preparing the background documents used in the course of the session, which are listed in the annex.

33. The Committee felt that, although the United Nations was carrying out a number of significant initiatives in the field of public administration and governance, these had not been sufficiently publicized throughout the world. It was therefore recommended that the United Nations enhance the dissemination of information concerning the activities related to the United Nations Programme in Public Administration and Finance, including United Nations Public Service Day, by engaging in a more effective public information campaign.

34. The Committee recognized the importance of a continued focus on cross-sectoral approaches and recommended that the coordination of the work of thematic

areas of the United Nations Programme in Public Administration and Finance be enhanced in order to foster greater coordination, linkages and synergies.

35. The Committee was convinced that e-government might be a very important tool for enhancing the effectiveness of government operations and public service delivery. He noted, however, that careful needs assessment should be undertaken before introducing e-government reforms. In this respect, it was suggested that the Secretariat could provide assistance to Governments, upon their request, in formulating effective strategies to implement e-government policies and to improve their public management systems. It was also proposed that the work of the Secretariat on e-government should reflect the issues and challenges that had emerged during the discussions of the session.

36. The Committee expressed appreciation for the continuing focus of the Secretariat on financial issues since resource mobilization and management were key to undertaking any reform in public administration. It also proposed that focusing on the financial aspects of public administration and on the impact of financial institutions on social and economic progress be continued.

37. It was recognized that information-sharing and exchange of experiences in public administration were extremely important in enhancing Governments' knowledge of successful practices and were key in providing options to Governments that were undertaking public administration reforms. It was strongly recommended that the Secretariat continue working in this area and produce more repertories and compendiums of best practices in public administration. In particular, the Committee suggested creating an inventory of administrative reform experiences that had taken place in different countries at the State, regional and local levels in order to assess their effectiveness.

38. The Committee praised the United Nations Online Network in Public Administration and Finance (UNPAN) for its excellent contribution to fostering the exchange of information and best practices, and as a provider of capacity-building for developing countries.

39. Overall, the Committee took note with appreciation of the invaluable role of the Secretariat, specifically of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs, in promoting the main principles and values endorsed by the Economic and Social Council; in devising and implementing programmes that would contribute to the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals; and in supporting through its activities the overall objectives of the international community. It also commended the Secretariat for its support to the work of the Committee. The Committee felt that providing advice and acting as a sounding board for the Department of Economic and Social Affairs — a function the Committee would strive to carry out to the best of its ability — offered an important opportunity for interface between the role of the Committee and that of the Secretariat.

Chapter IV
Future work of the Committee of Experts

1. As a follow-up to the discussions held at its first session, the Committee decided to further address the issue of its mandate and the relevance of its contribution to the United Nations system, in particular to the Economic and Social Council, to which it was mandated to provide advice. In this connection, it had greatly benefited from the discussion held by its Bureau with the Bureau of the Council.

2. The Committee identified its role as threefold: first, to identify emerging issues in the area of public administration and their policy implications for Member States, as well as make recommendations on principles and values concerning the role of public administration in the development process, which could contribute to policy decisions taken by the Economic and Social Council; second, to provide policy guidance and operational recommendations to Member States on how to address key issues relating to the functioning of the State, particularly in its effort to implement the United Nations Millennium Declaration and the commitments made at United Nations global conferences; and third, to provide guidance to the United Nations system in its work in the area of public administration by reviewing programmes and suggesting specific directions for its activities.

3. Given that revitalizing and revalidating public administration to enable the State to perform its changing role was an overarching priority, the Committee recommended that this theme be the focus of its discussion at its next meetings.

4. In line with the United Nations Millennium Declaration and in order to promote public sector institutional capacity for African renewal, the Committee decided to give special attention to Africa's needs by including this topic in the agenda of its next session. It also noted the progress made in public administration capacity-building, as foreseen by the New Partnership for African Development (NEPAD) (A/57/304, annex), particularly in the fields of comparative data, e-government, donor support for capacity-building, and governance indicators applicable to Africa, all bearing on the African peer review mechanism.

5. The Committee further stated that different cultures, priorities and stages of development made it impossible to adopt homogeneous solutions. Yet, it considered it necessary to identify commonalities by studying the various existing organizational traditions and by becoming attuned to the needs of people from different parts of the world, so as to strengthen a renewed spirit of multilateralism.

6. The Committee decided to address the issue of the values of public service by identifying and translating them into a set of major principles or charter, where the guiding principles enabling the State to promote democracy and economic development, as well as the role of all parties involved in the pursuit of the public interest, would be defined. Such a charter would be inspired by discussions or work taking place in some regions of the world and by the documents adopted in those regions, such as the Charter for the Public Service in Africa. At the same time, however, the Charter should constitute a statement valid for all countries and should be submitted to the Economic and Social Council for approval.

7. This initiative would be part of a concerted effort to enhance the role of public service and to respond to the growing demand for the restoration of the role of the public interest as a centrepiece for balanced and sustained development, which is essential to achieving the Millennium Development Goals.

Annex

List of documents

Document symbol	*Agenda item*	*Title or description*
E/C.16/2003/1	2	Adoption of the agenda and organization of work
E/C.16/2003/2	3	Report of the Secretariat on the status of and trends in the development of e-government
E/C.16/2003/3	4	Report of the Secretariat on basic data on the public sector
E/C.16/2003/4	3	Report of the Secretariat on the strategies for high-quality staffing in the public sector
E/C.16/2003/5	3	Report of the Secretariat on mainstreaming poverty reduction strategies within the Millennium Development Goals: the role of public administration

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E/2003/44
E/C.16/2003/6